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SUBJECT: "CANNING." Information from the home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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It won't be long now--until we'll be right in the middle of one of the busiest seasons of the year--the summer canning season. And there isn't any too much time left to be getting all your canning equipment in good shape.

For one of the first rules of canning success is this--"work as fast as you can." And you're going to be slowed down considerably if you find your steam pressure canner is out-of-order the day the string beans in the garden are just right to put up. Or if you have to make an extra trip into town on canning day to get some jar rubbers.

These little delays not only upset your schedule of work, but they may even result in poorer canned fruits or vegetables.

Fruits and vegetables need to be canned as soon as possible after they are gathered, say the canning experts. There are two big reasons for this. In the first place, there are enzymes in the fruits and vegetables that cause them to go on ripening even after they are gathered. If they are allowed to go on unchecked, these enzymes will cause fruits and vegetables to become overripe and hasten their decay. And in the second place, you preserve a lot more of the vitamins in the canned food if you carry every step of the canning process through as rapidly as possible.

But--getting back to checking the equipment and supplies. Here are some suggestions from home economists in the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

First of all-- do you have a canning budget? If you live on a farm, this canning budget fits right into your garden plans. When you make out your canning budget, figure how much food your family needs for a year. Then consider how long

fresh foods will be out of season. The best place to go for help in making out a canning budget is to your State College of Agriculture.

Next, is your canner in good shape? By canner I mean your steam pressure canner and your boiling water bath. These are the two best canners for the two different kinds of foods--the non-acid foods and the acid foods.

If you plan to can non-acid vegetables, you'll use a steam pressure canner. For only in such a canner can you get temperatures above boiling. And you need higher temperatures than boiling to kill the organisms that cause spoilage in practically all vegetables except tomatoes.

These steam pressure canners need to be re-checked each year to see that the pressure gage registers correctly. One way to get the gage checked is to take it off and send it into the factory where the pressure outfit was made. The manufacturer will check and adjust the gage. Or get help from your State Agricultural College or your local home demonstration agent.

As for processing acid foods--that is fruits and tomatoes--the best way to do this is to use a boiling water bath. You won't have much to check on this. Just make sure that all the parts are together. For a water bath canner, you may use a wash boiler--or a bucket--or any thing that is high enough to permit covering the cans or jars with 1 to 2 inches of water. Then you need a tight fitting lid and a rack for the bottom to set the cans or jars on.

Of course, there are other ways to can acid foods. You may process them in steamers--in the oven--or use the open kettle method. But none of these are highly recommended by the canning experts. And if you use the oven for processing - never use tin cans. Nor should you process peaches, pears, or apricots in the oven. If you do, you'll find they develop an unsightly brownish discoloration.

Next on the canning check-up list are the containers you'll need.

Here are a few points to check if you use glass jars--

"Always buy new rubber rings for glass jars. Good rubber rings stretch to twice their length. Throw away any jars or any caps that show chips, or cracks, or dents. And if a porcelain-lined metal lid has a lining that's the least bit loose --throw that away.

"Another thing--you may need to tighten the wire clamps on lightning type glass jars. To tighten them, simply bend the wire down in the middle on the top--and bend it a little inward at the sides."

And if you use tin cans--make sure that you have the right kind of tin for the kind of food in your canning budget.

"There are three types of tin cans--plain tin--C-enamel lined--and R-enamel lined. The C-enamel tin cans have a dull finish and a light gold color. You'll need them for corn--lima beans--kidney beans-- and succotash.

"The R-enamel lined cans are brighter finished--and have a deeper gold color. You use the R-enamel for many of the red-colored fruits and vegetables. You'll want them for berries--beets--cherries--cranberries--plums--pumpkin-- and squash.

"For all the other fruits and vegetables, plain tin cans will fill the bill."

And finally--when you're checking your canning supplies--remember one of the most necessary of all--the water supply. Water that is all right for drinking usually is all right for canning purposes. But very hard water is not. For hard water makes the tissues of vegetables tough and makes fruit sirups look cloudy. So if you have to use very hard water, it's a good idea to soften it first. You can soften hard water enough for canning by boiling the water--then straining it through several thicknesses of muslin. Or you can boil the water--then allow it to stand for awhile until a fine precipitate settles to the bottom of the pan. Simply pour off the water from the "settlings." Either way is satisfactory.

And good luck to you in your canning this summer. For it looks as though this were going to be a year when it's especially wise to have a well-stocked pantry, for whatever emergency may be ahead.

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